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Parsi Charity Organisation
Society

Parsi poverty

[Bombay]

[1922]

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PARSI CHARITY ORGANISATION SOCIETY.

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Parsi Charity Organisation Society.

We crave permission to place before our members and the Parsi community for their information a series of tabulated statements based on an analysis of 156 cases, about the facts of which we feel more or less certain. These facts have been carefully ascertained by personal investigation through our volunteer workers, and these cases have been under our observation for periods ranging from six months to a year and a half. These cases have been selected as typical cases in which the need for help is evident, out of a total of about 570 cases in all, that have been brought to the notice of our Society during a year and a half. There is no need to state that the remaining 414 cases were either found not deserving of help, or some of them were cases about the facts of which we were not absolutely certain.

Before we proceed further our Society considers it necessary for the purpose of avoiding misunderstanding to draw attention to the fact that it has consistently discountenanced the system of periodic doles except to the old and decrepit who are absolutely helpless; that it has regarded an indiscriminate distribution of periodic doles as demoralising in the extreme. Thus, as mentioned in our last annual report, our Society was asked to investigate and report on about 400 cases by different charity Funds. As the result of our investigations we advised the Funds to decline help in 205 cases, and to give or renew help only in 141 cases. Whilst our Society, therefore has thought it fit to draw public attention to the story revealed by the statistics of these 156 cases that we have analysed, it hopes that its attitude in the matter of indiscriminate periodic doles will not be misconstrued, and that it will not be thought that the Society is associating itself with that unfortunate system of doling out 4 or Rs. 5 a month which is aggravating destitution and so effectively contributing to a loss of self-respect amongst the poor classes of the community.

Turning now to the story of poverty revealed by our tabulated statements, and taking the figures of single widows in the first instance we note that out of the 13 single widows who live in Ashrams, 10 are unfit for work, and get an average help of Rs. 14/8 per month; that the three widows who are fit for work earn an average of Rs. 8 per month, and receive an average help to the extent of Rs. 12 per month. These widows pay a nominal rental of 8 annas a month. We note further that the 35 single widows who do not live in Ashrams pay an average rent of Rs. 4 per month, that out of these 35, 19 are unfit for work and have no earnings and receive an average help of Rs. 14 per month, and that the 16 others who are fit for work earn an average of Rs. 9 per month and get help to the extent of 13 Rs. per month. It will thus be noticed that out of the total of 48 single widows who figure in our analysis, there are 29 who are unfit for work, and that they receive an average help of Rs. 14 per month, and that out of these 29, 19 have to pay a rental of Rs. 4 per month for occupying dark ill-ventilated rooms which our committee believe are unfit for human habitation, which leaves them a bare Rs. 10 per month to be spent on food and other necessities of life. The remaining 19 widows who are fit for work have a total income including help of Rs. 20 to 22 per month, and as 16 of them have to pay a rental of Rs. 4 per month, they have a total income including help of Rs. 18 per month which they can spend on food and other necessities. We also note that out of these 48 single widows 27 are over 55 years in age. We have also noted that 29 of them are found unfit for work. These figures bear out a conclusion which may be corroborated by other considerations—that normally a person gets incapacitated for work at the age of 55—more especially a woman amongst the classes that are helped from charity Funds, whose sole occupation on account of illiteracy is either cooking or doing sewing-work of a simple character.

Turning in the next place to widows who have children and who are dependent on charities we find that their plight is in no way better than that of single widows. Out of the 76 cases analysed we find that there are 14 widows with children who have no earnings of any kind. The average help in

these cases is Rs. 23 per month. The average rent is Rs. 7 per month. This leaves to the widow and her children an average of Rs. 16 per month. We find further that the average number of persons in the family including the widow herself in these 14 cases is 3. Thus the help which is given in these 14 cases after deducting the rent amounts to a bare Rs. 5 per head. This is all that is left to be spent on food and other necessities. It must be remembered that in these cases the help from charity Funds constitutes the entire source of maintenance for the family.

Taking the remaining 62 cases of widows with children who receive help, and who are found to have earnings we note that the average help per family is Rs. 17 per month. The average earnings per family amount to Rs. 18/8 per month. The total average resources of a family thus amount to Rs. 35/8 per month. These 62 families pay an average rental of 7/8 Rs. per month. Thus the amount that remains after deducting rent to the family including help to be spent on food and other necessities of life is Rs. 28 per month. The average number of persons to a family in these 62 cases including the widows and dependents is 3.5. Thus the amounts per head that such a family can spend on food and other necessities of life is Rs. 8 per month. We also find that in the majority of these cases the children are below 18, that is, still schooling, that the widow and children are to a large extent suffering from some ailment or another and are chronic invalids—the complaints most frequent being fever, rheumatic complaints, diarrhoea, etc.—and that in very many cases the ailments are traceable to unhealthy surroundings and bad accommodation. If we deduct the number of school-going children in these 62 families, the average earnings do not exceed Rs. 9 to 10 per month. And as in the case of single widows so in the case of widows with children and their dependants who are capable of earning, we believe that these small earnings are due to 2 or 3 causes, viz :—

- (1) The limited character of the occupations in which women of these classes can be employed—either cooking or sewing of a simple kind.

- (2) Even the income which they could thus obtain by work being considerably reduced by chronic ailments due to bad housing.
- (3) With regard to the grown-up men to be found associated with these cases, their earnings being limited owing to their being usually illiterate, and working only 15 to 20 days in the month, on account of chronic troubles, as fitters, turners, or carpenters.

Turning to the 20 cases of married couples who are helped, we find that there are 9 couples who get an average help per family of Rs. 19 per month, and who have children dependent on them, the average earnings per family in these 9 cases are Rs. 20 per month, the total resources including help, in each of these 9 cases thus come to roughly Rs. 40 per month. The average number of children in these 9 cases is 3. Thus each family consists of 5 souls. But of the Rs. 40 the rent absorbs Rs. 7 per month, thus leaving Rs. 33 per month to be spent on food and necessities of life; or counting 5 persons to a family the amount that such a family can spend per head on food and other necessities is Rs. 6/8 per month. There are 4 couples out of these 20 who are helped that have no children, and who are unable to work, husband and wife alike being over 55. They have no earnings and the help they receive is Rs. 24 per month. These 4 couples pay an average rent of 5 Rs. per month. Thus the amount they can spend on food and other necessities is Rs. 10 per head. There are 7 couples out of these 20 who have no children, but whose average earnings come to Rs. 16 per month. They pay an average rental of 7 Rs. per month, and they get an average help of 10 Rs. per month. Their total resources including help thus come to Rs. 26 per month; deducting the rent of Rs. 7 per month, the amount that remains to be spent on food and other necessities comes to Rs. 10 per month.

The number of spinsters helped is 12. 11 out of these are below 40 in age. They pay an average rental of Rs. 5 per month. Their average earnings come to Rs. 5 per month, and the average help they receive is Rs. 9 per month. Many of these spinsters are weak in mind or chronic invalids, hence

their low earnings. Their total resources including help are thus Rs. 14 per month. Deducting the rental of Rs. 5 per month, the amount left to be spent on food and other necessities is Rs. 9 per month.

Taking all these 156 cases into consideration we find that there are 3 single widows living in Ashrams, whose help and earnings give them Rs. 19 per month; and 16 single widows not living in Ashrams whose help and earnings after deducting rent come to Rs. 18 per month. But barring these 19 cases, in the remaining 137 cases the amount to be spent on food and necessities of life, even when this amount is supplemented by earnings, works out at a pittance varying from Rs. 5 to Rs. 10 per month per head. Now we are in a position to ascertain the minimum expenditure on food alone for a single individual which will suffice to keep him or her physically fit. The following budget is fairly representative of the amount required in a month under various heads :—

	Rs. as.
Tea ... ..	... 1 0
Milk at 6 as. a seer quarter seer per day ...	... 2 13
Sugar 5 seers...	... 0 12
Eggs 1 per day ... ..	... 1 14
Ghee 4 seers...	... 3 0
Oil for cooking 2 seers ... ..	... 0 10
Rice ... ..	... 1 14
Daul 5 seers ... ..	... 1 3
3 cocoanuts ... ..	... 0 6
Onions 10 seers ... ..	... 0 10
Species ... ..	... 1 0
Mutton quarter lb. per day ... ..	... 3 12
Vegetables 1 anna per day ... ..	... 1 14
Fuel-wood for cooking and bath ... ..	... 3 0
Flour ... ..	... 0 9
	<hr/>
	24 5

Thus a single individual requires for food alone Rs. 24 per month to keep him or her physically fit. Even supposing there might be some saving in the cost of items like fuel-wood, ghee, rice, etc., in the case of families consisting of 3 or 4 persons, the amount required per head for food alone will not be less than Rs. 20 per month. Now in 19 out of the 156 cases we have analysed—and these 19 cases, are cases of single widows—the total resources never go beyond Rs. 19 per head, and in the larger majority of the cases they do not go beyond Rs. 10 per month. We have not included in our monthly budget items like clothing, oil for lighting, washing-charges, medicines, etc. The majority of these families thus live on starvation rates getting barely enough to keep alive, still less to keep physically fit. They live in the most unhealthy surroundings in dark ill-lighted ill-ventilated rooms, some of them in open verandahs, others in windowless garrets. The majority suffer from chronic diseases which prevent them from earning to their full capacities. Their earning capacities further are limited not only by illness but on account also of illiteracy.

It is these cases that require greater help. The resources of our charity Funds which are ample enough to meet the requirements of such cases are unfortunately scattered and spread over a large field, which include very many cases in which the need for help may not be as urgent, and in which pittance of 4 and 5 Rupees a month only lower self-respect while they serve no useful purpose. We desire expressly to draw the attention of charity Funds to the need of applying their resources to cases like those that we have analysed. Much of the help given in such cases may be regarded as old age pension. In other cases where parties are capable of earning, we believe that a normally healthy woman doing sewing-work at home for 6 hours a day cannot earn more than Rs. 15 to 18 a month. That if she does cooking-work she would earn Rs. 30 a month if she works all the days in the month. We find, moreover, that these are about the only occupations in which women receiving help are found

engaged, and that considerable interruption in work takes place on account of chronic ailments. These facts point to the desirability

- (1) of providing sanatoria equipped with medical facilities, where people suffering from such chronic ailments would get a chance of cure,
- (2) of providing facilities for training the women in such other occupations as would increase their earning-capacity,
- (3) of providing above all better housing in all these cases.

Our committee believe that the last is the only radical method of getting rid of diseases and ailments which are so largely responsible for diminished earnings and consequent destitution.

It is possible to meet these requirements by starting on institution where (1) families might be housed in healthy surroundings and under sanitary conditions, (2) they might be fed on simple but wholesome food good enough to keep them physically fit, (3) they might have proper medical advice and treatment when ill, (4) they might have proper facilities for the education of their children, and for their own training in such occupations as would increase their earning capacity. In order that such families may not lose their sense of self-respect, nor have their finer susceptibilities benumbed, the members of such families who are fit for work, should contribute out of their earnings towards their own maintenance a sum not exceeding a certain percentage of their earning or not exceeding a fixed sum per month per head.

We believe that such an institution based upon the principle of self-help for its inmates to the extent of its possibility can be easily-started, equipped, and maintained if our charity Funds will only join forces, and instead of running on in present grooves and helping the poor to prolong their miserable existence in revolting conditions, agree to contribute towards such an institution to the extent of their resources

for such purposes as would fall within the scope of the objects for which the charities have been founded. Should there be any deficit the flow of Parsi charity is still full and strong enough to make up for it.

P. A. WADIA,

Hon. Secretary.

Hormazd Villa,

PARSI CHARITY ORGANISATION SOCIETY.

MALABAR HILL.

Bombay, 14th. Feb. 1922.

	Total number helped	Average Rent	Average help per head per month	Average help per family p. m.	Average earnings per head p. m.	Average earnings per family p. m.	Division by age		
							Between 20 & 40	Between 40 & 55	Over 55
Single widows living in Ashram	13	0-8-0	Rs. 11		—		—	4	9
Single widows living in Ashram who earn ...	3	0-8-0	Rs. 12		Rs. 8				
Single widows living in Ashram unfit for work.	10	0-8-0	Rs. 14/8						
Single widows <i>not</i> living in Ashrams	35	Rs. 4/-	Rs. 14		Rs. 7		2	15	18
Single widows <i>not</i> living in Ashrams unfit for work.	19	Rs. 4/-	Rs. 14				—	7	12
Single widows <i>not</i> living in Ashrams and fit for work	16	Rs. 4/-	Rs. 13		Rs. 9				
Widows with children with no earnings ...	14	Rs. 7	Rs. 8	Rs. 23			4	5	5
Widows with children with earnings	62	Rs. 7/8	Rs. 5	Rs. 17	Rs. 5	Rs. 18/8	22	26	14
Widows with children living in Ashrams ...	10	0-8-0	Rs. 5	Rs. 16	Rs. 4	Rs. 13/8			
Husband and wife with children	9	Rs. 7	Rs. 4	Rs. 19	Rs. 4	Rs. 20			
Husband and wife with no children and no earnings	4	Rs. 5	Rs. 12	Rs. 24			—	—	4
Husband and wife with no children but with earnings	7	Rs. 7	Rs. 5	Rs. 10	Rs. 8	Rs. 16	—	2	5
Spinsters... ..	12	Rs. 5	Rs. 9		Rs. 5		11	1	—

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